

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00413 050814Z
ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9169

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 413

EXDIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI PDIP SHUM CASC LA US
SUBJECT: AMERICAN MIA'S IN LAOS

REF: STATE 82747

1. AS YOU KNOW FROM OUR 405, THERE IS A STRONG POSSIBILITY THAT OTHER COUNTRIES' CONTRIBUTIONS HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY MET THE LAO DROUGHT EMERGENCY. PROVIDED WE CAN GET SOME CONFIRMATION OF THIS TURN OF EVENTS, THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE NO LONGER ANY CHANCE (OR RISK) OF LINKING U.S. FOOD AID WITH THE MIA ISSUE.

2. NEVERTHELESS, THE INFORMAL APPROACH ON MIA'S SUGGESTED IN YOUR 82747 DOES NOT GIVE ME, NOR WOULD IT GIVE ME -- SHOULD THE FOOD AID ISSUE TURN OUT TO BE STILL ALIVE -- ANY GREAT PROBLEMS. AS INDICATED IN MY 350, IT IS ESSENTIALLY THE LINE I TOOK WITH NOUPHAN ON MARCH 16. AS I DID ON THAT OCCASION, I COULD AVOID ANY DIRECT INDICATION OF LINKAGE, BUT I COULD MAKE IT PLAIN THAT PROGRESS ON MIA'S WOULD GREATLY IMPROVE THE "ATMOSPHERE" AND THE "AMBIANCE" OF OUR RELATIONS.

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3. THERE ARE A COUPLE OF PROBLEMS, HOWEVER, ONE SMALL AND THE OTHER LARGE. THE SMALL ONE IS THAT THE CHANCES OF MAKING A PITCH OF THIS SORT ON AN INFORMAL SOCIAL OCCASION ARE VERY SLIGHT. NOUPHAN AND SOUBANH OCCASIONALLY SHOW UP AT LARGE RECEPTIONS, BUT I THINK I HAVE ONLY BEEN AT ONE DINNER SINCE I CAME HERE WHEN SOUBANH WAS PRESENT AND AT NONE WITH NOUPHAN. HIGH-

LEVEL LAO AVOID THE DIPLOMATIC SOCIAL CIRCUIT, PARTICULARLY THOSE OCCASIONS WHERE THEY KNOW THERE WILL BE HEAVY WESTERN ATTENDANCE. I WOULD THUS PROBABLY HAVE TO MAKE ANY MIA PRESENTATIONS IN THE COURSE OF AN OFFICE CALL, WHICH COULD OF COURSE BE PRIMARILY DEVOTED TO ANOTHER SUBJECT SUCH AS NARCOTICS OR ANTI-AMERICAN MEDIA ATTACKS, WITH MIA'S INTRODUCED IN AN INFORMAL MANNER.

4. THE MAJOR PROBLEM IS THE ONE WHICH I WAS TRYING TO POINT OUT IN THE COMMENT PARAGRAPHS OF MY 350. THE LAO FEEL THAT THEY HAVE PROVIDED US WITH IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON MIA'S, SPECIFICALLY, THE FACT THAT THERE ARE NO LIVE MIA'S IN LAOS. THEY HAVE ALSO TRIED TO COLLECT INFORMATION BUT HAVE SO FAR FAILED BECAUSE OF THE COUNTRY'S RUGGED TOPOGRAPHY, ITS SPARSE POPULATION, ITS SERIOUS INSURGENT PROBLEM, AND THE LPDR'S APPALLING WEAKNESS AND LACK OF CAPABILITY. I THINK THAT GIVEN THESE PROBLEMS, WE HAVE ALREADY PROBABLY GOT ABOUT AS MUCH INFORMATION FROM THE LAO ON MIA'S AS WE CAN REASONABLY EXPECT TO GET.

5. I WILL THUS SEEK OUT AN OCCASION TO MAKE THE INFORMAL PRESENTATION YOU SUGGEST. I THINK IT WOULD BE BEST TO DO IT AS PART OF A BROAD TOUR D'HORIZON WHICH WOULD INCLUDE A DISCUSSION OF THE APPARENT LAO SUCCESS IN MEETING THEIR DROUGHT AID NEEDS, OF LAO MEDIA
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ATTACKS ON ALLEGED U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE INSURGENCY, AND OF NARCOTICS. I COULD THEN FOLLOW UP BY GIVING THE LAO A COPY OF THE ASIAN SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT TO THE HIRC WHEN IT APPEARS IN MAY. IF THIS REPORT IS SUFFICIENTLY STRONG, IT WOULD BE VERY HELPFUL, SINCE DSPITE ALL WE HAVE SAID, THE LAO STILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT WE ARE AS INTERESTED AS WE SAY WE ARE IN THE REMAINS OF PEOPLE KNOWN TO BE LONG DEAD.
ROBERTS

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